

**Worship Service  
Sunday December 18, 2016  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent**

**Theme: "Worshipping in the Circle of Love as we wait for Christ"**

**WE GATHER IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

Gathering Song: **"O come all ye faithful"**

Bop # 159

Welcome and Sharing of the peace  
(We greet each other saying, "**The Peace of Christ be with you**")

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 89: 1-4, 19-26):

*One:* We sing of God's mercy and grace shown to all generations.

**Many:** **We praise God's constant and never-ending love and faithfulness.**

*One:* We rejoice that God's promise of an anointed one—the Messiah is about to be fulfilled.

**Many:** **O come, O come, Emmanuel—God with us—forever!**

Hymn: **"Blessed be the God of Israel"**

Blessed be the God of Israel, Who comes to set us free  
And raises up new hope for us A Branch from David's tree  
So have the prophets long declared That with a mighty arm  
God would turn back our enemies And all who wish us harm

With promised mercy will God still The covenant recall  
The oath once sworn to Abraham From foes to save us all  
That we might worship without fear And offer lives of praise  
In holiness and righteousness To serve God all our days

My child as prophet of the Lord You will prepare the way  
To tell God's people they are saved From sin's eternal sway  
Then shall God's mercy from on high Shine forth and never cease  
To drive away the gloom of death And lead us into peace

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Prayer of Adoration:

*Pastor:* First and Last,  
Creator of the world,  
Lover of the world,  
*Voice 1:* Life within us and around us,  
*Voice 2:* Beside you there is no greater allegiance in our life.  
*Voice 3:* We come to sing praises with the angels,

*Pastor:* We come to adore you with Joseph,  
*Voice 1:* We come to ponder your mystery with Mary,  
*Voice 2:* We come to you this day, because you first came to us.  
*Voice 3:* We come to love you because you first loved us.

**All: Let us receive the good news of God's love for all.  
Let us accept the great gifts that Christ brings with gratitude.  
Let us worship God in the beauty of all holiness.**

*P:* We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**All: Amen.**

Sung Prayer: Solo "Ready the way"

**WE LIGHT THE CANDLE OF JOY**

Lighting of the Advent Candles

Song: "Dawning Light of Our Salvation"

1. Long in darkness Israel wandered;  
Long in mortal shadows, we  
Walked in bondage and self-pity,  
Trod in paths of sin and grief.  
In the prophets' words He told us,  
Long the God of Israel spoke;  
He alone in strength would save us  
From the hands of all our foes.

*Refrain:*  
Every valley be exalted!  
Every mountain be made plane!

Crooked ways repent and straighten;  
All creation bend in praise!

2. He shall raise a mighty Savior;  
Born of David's lineage, He  
Comes in cov'nant love to claim us  
From our sins to set us free.  
Light to those who dwell in darkness  
Life to those from death who flee  
Joy unto the earth, and gladness,  
To your pathways dawning peace!

*Refrain*

3. Jesus, Lord, and mighty Savior,  
David's Son and yet his King,  
Dawning light of our salvation,  
Of your saving pow'r we sing!  
Stand, Oh lame, and dance ye broken,  
Know the Savior's healing grace;  
Come, Oh deaf and hear him singing;  
Turn, Oh blind, behold his face!

*Refrain*

Words: Wendell Kimbrough (c) 2012 Wendell Kimbrough  
Music: Bruce Benedict, (c) 2012 Cardiphonia

Youth message: **"What's in a Name"**

Youth Hymn: **"'Twas in the moon of wintertime"**

Bop #144

### **GOD SPEAKS TO US FROM HIS WORD**

Prayer for Understanding:

**O Lord, the one who breaks into the history of the world, and into our personal stories, come to us today through your word. Illumine our minds to see clearly what this event meant for your people. And also open our minds that we may experience how you are revealing yourself to us in our day. For the sake of your son, Amen.**

The Reading of Scripture:

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

Matthew 1: 21-25

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God!**

Sermon: **“God’s Loving Presence with all People”**

Text: Matthew 1: 21-25

***21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:***

***23 “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”***

***which means, “God is with us.” 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;[j] and he named him Jesus.***

- The Jews were looking waiting for a deliver; one who would come to change their lives and establish an order that would give every person a sense of fulfillment.
- They were also at a juncture in their lives were many things within the system of governance needed adjustment.
- The pronouncement made by the Angel of the Lord to Joseph spoke to the fact that the one who was to come would bring about some change in their lives. One this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent let us consider three important things from this text.
- Firstly, the Angel of the Lord said to him, “the son that will be born of Mary should be named Jesus, which means salvation or the one who save people from their sins.

This was a very powerful pronouncement as it would guarantee that those who felt estranged from Yahweh and otherwise lost would now have a chance to be saved. Before this time of Jesus’ pending birth salvation was not a rite, it was a privilege. People were saved largely through their different religious beliefs which helped some but hindered others. Furthermore, there was a disconnect for many as they were somewhat cut off from the God of their forefathers. Many

could not meet the strict requirements in order to be saved because there were clear lines that divided rich from poor, those who belonged and those who did not. Salvation for many was an ideal that could not be achieved as many were thought not to have what it required to be saved; many were not considered to have the Jewish pedigree or be of the Jewish bloodline to deserve salvation.

- Secondly, the Messiah, who was to be called Jesus was coming as a fulfillment of the Lord's word through the Prophets. That divine word stated that, "his name will be Emmanuel which means, God with us."

This Divine word also inspired much hope for those who were disenfranchised and disconnected from community or the promise of salvation. The coming Messiah was, Emmanuel, would dwell with people. The beauty of this is that there was no stratification or identifying who he would dwell with as all people could now own and claim this promise.

- The third point I want to make is, people could now look forward to being saved, they no longer had to think of who they were or to which culture they belong. They could also look forward to a messiah who was coming to dwell with them wherever they were in their lives. Friends, this was all made possible by a God who loves us unconditionally and would look beyond who we were, what nation we belong to and also look beyond the systems of that day and age. God's unconditional love was about to reach humanity in a personal way through the person of Jesus Christ.

Today we live in a world where so many questions linger about the divisions that exist among nations and peoples. Some see it as a norm as with so many different races and cultures but others would love to see much more equality in a world where God's reign is unquestionable.

Here is a word from the Lord on this fourth Sunday of Advent that assures humanity that all can be saved. The commemoration of Jesus' entry into our lives gives renewed hope to all cultures, races, classes and persuasions that salvation is not only for a select few but for all who wait for the return of the Kings of Kings. We await the wonderful counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting father and the Prince of peace; we await Emmanuel who is coming to dwell with us in all our lives situations. Whether we are kings or paupers, young or old, sick or healthy, in a mess or doing ok, Christ comes to dwell with us and the overwhelming pronouncement is that he comes to save us.

How do we find ourselves in this very blessed position, this position of privilege and prestige? God's never ending love toward us guarantees our salvation and our standing in this life where many are so often marginalized. Today we can remind ourselves of John 3:16, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."** We may not be perfect, we may not meet the requirements of others around us; we may have made mistakes and fallen short of made up human standards. Today we can experience joy, hope and peace because we live and believe in a God who sends his only son to extend that undying love towards us.

American song writer and actress Jennifer Hudson puts it beautifully in this song:

***I'm not perfect but he loves me anyway.  
Wasn't an angel in my younger days.  
We all have done things, that's between us and God.***

***There's no better comfort than being in his arms.  
He loves me still.  
He loves us still.  
I'm not perfect but he loves me anyway.  
This loneliness fills every inch of every open but his grace and mercy gives me strength when I am weak and carries me when I can't stand on my own feet.  
He loves me still.  
So glad he loves me still.  
And when I'm down he lifts me up.  
He sees beyond what I've become.  
Lord lift me up I feel so down.  
Yet he loves me still.  
So glad he loves me still.***

As we move one week close toward Christmas know that God's love is overflowing for all humanity and Jesus comes to dwell with us wherever we are.  
**Amen.**

Hymn of Response: **"In Loving Partnership"**

Bop # 759

Prayers of God's People, concluding with the Lord's Prayer

**WE BRING OUR GIFTS**

Work and Witness of our Church

A Time of Giving

Sung Response: **“Praise God, from Whom all Blessings Flow”** BoP#79

**WE LEAVE WITH CHRIST'S PEACE**

The Benediction

Recessional Hymn: **“Once in Royal David's City”**

Bop #166